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**SUBJECT: (FOREIGN TITLE)**

Sbornik Materialov po Izucheniyu Opyta Voyny (No.9)  
(F)

**SUBJECT: (ENGLISH TITLE)**

The Vol. 1 Luki Operation

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The action known as the Veliki Luki Operation was performed by the troops of the 3rd. Shock Army of the Malinin Front in the period from the 25th. of November, 1942 to the 20th. of January, 1943. It is rich in examples of various types of manoeuvre. It started with relatively small forces but it developed later by the introduction of additional units and formations by both the fighting sides. Furthermore this operation supplied much material for the study of a large, heavily defended settled locality. The careful study of the Veliki Luki Operation is of great value for senior officers and generals of all arms.

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The Enemy Situation and the Character of his Defensive Measures

The German command, realizing that with the start of winter the troops of the Malinin Front would take advantage of their exposed position and start an offensive movement, and, therefore, towards the end of October, 1942, started to withdraw its troops from the comparatively quiet sector, and to re-group them in the area of Belyy and Veliki Luki, where, at that time, our troops were preparing for an offensive. During the second half of October the Germans transferred into the area of Novosokol'niki from the direction of Volkhovsk three mountain rifle divisions, and during the beginning of November they transferred into this area three Jaeger battalions and one defense battalion. From the depth of their area the Germans transferred into the same area the 1st. Chemical Mortar Regiment. Into the area of Mogreki, Polibino, besides the separate subunits and units, the Germans also moved up the 291st. Infantry Division.

The enemy at the beginning not having sufficient troops to hold the entire front, grouped his forces in the most likely avenues of attack. At the beginning of the operation the area of Veliki Luki was defended by units of the 83rd. Infantry Division and the 336 th. Security Battalion. In the direction of Nevel, the front of Stupino,

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Mart'yanovo, Forech'ye, was covered by the 591st. Security and the 5th. Rifle Battalions. The interval between these two defended positions and the area north of Veliki Luki was occupied by the enemy only in the settled localities by separate small garrisons.

The enemy's reserves - the 3rd. Mountain Rifle Division and the 1st. Chemical Warfare Mortar Regiment - were, at the beginning, of the operation, located in the area of Novosokol'nik. The 20th. Motorized Division was assembling in the area north-east of Nevel. In addition the 8th. Tank Division was moved from the area of Kholm'sk into the area of Nasva. The staff of the 59th. Army Corps was sent from Vitebsk to Novosokol'nik to take charge of the German troops operating in the direction of Veliki Luki. At the beginning of the operation the Germans had the following troops in Veliki Luki: One infantry division, (the 80th.) and eight separate battalions in the first line of defence, and, in reserve, one mountain rifle division, (the 3rd.) and one chemical warfare regiment, and three divisions (the 291st. Infantry, the 20th. Motorized, and the 8th. Tank Division), approaching the area.

The enemy defences on the near side of town consisted of two defended areas, including several fortified points built for all-around defence. The first defended area ran through a line of settled locations 2 to 3 km. from Veliki Luki. The second area included the outskirts of the town, and not adhering to settled localities, it was the stronger. All settlements were prepared for all-around defence. For the further defence of the town itself many large and small buildings had been prepared for it. These included the castle, the railway station, large stone houses, churches, monasteries, schools, baths and other buildings of that type. Taken as a whole, the enemy's weakest defences were in the south-western area, but in the town itself the western sector was the weakest.

The Battle Area:

The battle raged in the area Veliki Luki, Nasva, Novosokol'niki

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and Nevel. This area was important because it was crossed by a large number of roads and presented the possibility of being used as a convenient base for a thrust into the rear of our troops in the direction of Toropetz and Staraya Toropa. The existence of railheads in the enemy's rear gave them the capability to perform interfrontal transfers. These railways were the lines Dno-Vitabsk, and Pskov - Polotsk. The capture of the Veliki Luki base denied the enemy the capability to perform a flanking thrust and broke the rail connection Dno - Vitabsk.

The terrain in this area consisted of irregular ravines with a large number of lakes and swamps, which, even in winter, could not be traversed by large all-arms formations. The only exception to that was that the valley of the river Lovat' which flowing in a northerly direction from Veliki Luki was quite boggy and heavily wooded. The river itself had an average depth of 1 to 1.5 meters and a width of 25 to 30 meters and did not, therefore, present a serious obstacle to crossing.

The town of Veliki Luki lying at the source of the river Lovat' was a main junction for east-west roads. The settlements surrounding the town, Sovkhoze and labor settlements, assisted in the preparation of defended zones in their approaches. The rivers Lovat' and Lozovitsa divide Veliki Luki into three parts, the northern, central and eastern. In the western part of the town there were several churches and the old castle which is surrounded by two large earth embankments. The buildings in the central sector, the new part of the town, containing all the administrative, cultural, and trade establishments, was all built of stone. The eastern sector, the industrial, was separated from the central by the river Lozavski. In it, around the railway station, were grouped establishments, factories, and depots. A large military barracks area was also located there. On the whole, there were many main buildings in the town which were suited for a determined defence, covering the roads to Norosokol'nik and Nasvi.

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The Assembly of the Troops:

On the 10th. of November the defence in the direction of Veliki Luki was held by the 257th. and 28th. Rifle Divisions, the 31st. and 184th. Tank Brigades, the 613 th. Artillery Regiment and the 699 th. Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment of the GHQ Reserve.

In the period from the 10th. to the 24th. of November other units were sent there from other sectors of the front as well as from the rear. From the area Toroptsa the 381st. Rifle Division marched in and assembled in the area Gorokhovyye, Nazovichi; the 357th. Rifle Division, during the same time, assembled in the area Strizhevo; the 9th. Guard Rifle Division - in the area eastwards of Luznetsovo; the 46th. Guards Rifle Division, after disembarking at Toroptsa, moved to the area of Sishkovo and the 21st. Guards Rifle Division - in the area of Privtsovo.

Additional reinforcements arrived and concentrated as follows: the 37th. Tank Regiment in the area of Sukh.Ushitst; the 2nd. Mechanized Corps (composed of the 18th., 34th., and 43rd. Mechanized and the 36th. and 33rd. Tank Brigades), after a difficult, 400 km. road march over very badly broken-up roads in which they lost much transport and equipment, arrived on the 24th. of November in the area of Grishino, Lukino; the 184th. Tank Brigade - in the area of Mulino.

As the result of the concentration and re-grouping we had been able to achieve a superiority in men and equipment as is shown in the following table:

Item	On the whole front	In direction of main thrust
Infantry	2 times	5 times
Machine Guns	1.3	5
Mortars	3	6.5
Artillery	3.5	5.5
Tanks	Absolute	Absolute

The 3rd. Shock Army Commanders Division: The main thrust was to be delivered by units of the 5th. Guards Rifle ~~117th~~ <sup>Corps</sup> (357th. Rifle

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and the 9th. and 46th. Guards Rifle Divisions) on the front Mordovishche Pozhary, in the general direction of Ostrian'. After reaching the line of Lake Lisloye, Butitino, the main forces were to exploit the success in the direction of Novosokol'niki, but units of the 381st., the 257th., and 357th. Rifle Divisions were to encircle and destroy the enemy in Veliki Luki. A supporting thrust was to be delivered by the 381st. Rifle Division in the general direction of Litovo.

As can be seen from the information, the operation had a limited objective only - to destroy the Veliki Luki enemy group and to occupy the bridgehead. The forces were so grouped and the thrusts were so planned to strike at more or less weaker spots in the enemy's defence.

Conforming to these decisions the formations of the army received the following tasks: the 381st. Rifle Division with the ski battalion of the 257th. Rifle Division and a company of tanks were to overcome Litovo, Zemlyanichina, and following that to bypass Veliki Luki on the north-west.

The 257th. Rifle Division, holding the forward defence line, was to by-pass Veliki Luki on the north-east and south-east.

The 357th. Rifle Division, with the 27th. Tank Corps, were given the assignment to destroy the enemy's defences in the direction of Mordovishche, Kryukovo, and to bypass Veliki Luki on the south-west.

The 9th. Guards Rifle Division, with the 36th. Tank Regiment, advancing in the direction of Ostrian', were to reach the line Lake Lisloye, station Gushchina.

The 46th. Guards Rifle Division, with the 34th. Tank Regiment, was to move to the boundary Plokhovo-Sedurina.

The 21st. Guards Rifle Division with the 37th. Tank Regiment were to capture the line Fenina-Tolubina.

The 28th. Rifle Division were, in cooperation with the 21st. Rifle Division, to encircle and destroy the enemy in the area Stupino, Kort'yanovo, and to advance to the line Balabolkina - Zimnik.

The 235th. Rifle Regiment remained in the army's reserve and concentrated in the area of Orekhovo. The 184th. Tank Brigade, protecting

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the left flank of the striking group, was to be prepared, from the area of Mulina, to cooperate with the 235th. Rifle Regiment in cutting off any possible enemy counter-attack in the direction of Mulina, Foroch'iye, or Mulina, Safonova.

The 2nd. Mechanized Corps was the army commander's reserve. It concentrated in the area Svkh.Vshitsy, Shcherganikha, and was to be used to parry any enemy attack from the direction of Veliki Luki, and, if necessary, to exploit success.

The 31st. Rifle Brigade, protecting the right flank of the striking force, was to be prepared, from the area of Losevo, to counter-attack in the direction of Martinkovo, Gubany, Rozhkovochi, and to engage Tolub'yovo.

As can be seen, the army had built its attack in one echelon. The 2nd. Mechanized Corps, composing the reserve, could not be expected to fulfill the tasks envisaged for the second echelon. As will be seen later, this circumstance had an important effect on the progress of the operation.

The Breakthrough of the enemy's Defences: (See Sketch 12 -not included in translation, missing in the original).

At 1100 hours on the 24th. of November the forward elements of the 357th. Rifle, the 9th., 46th., and 21st. Guards Divisions, started a battle reconnaissance of the enemy's forward defences. Lack of detailed knowledge of the forward enemy defence line resulted in weak and ineffective action by the troops. Even after a day's fighting they were unable to uncover the entire system of the enemy's forward defences. This development prevented our artillery from suppressing effectively the enemy's system of fire for the beginning of the attack.

On the morning of the 25th. of November the main forces of the Veliki Luki grouping of the 3rd. Shock Army attacked. The 357th. Rifle Division, meeting strong enemy ~~positions~~ <sup>fire concentrations</sup> only occupied the localities of Batalikha and Loruska on the 26th. of November. During the night of the 27th. to the 28th. of November, the division was to

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regroup towards the right flank, to dislodge the Germans from Mordovishche, and to cut the railroad Veliki Luki - Novosokol'niki. During that time the 953rd. Regiment of the 257th. Division, advancing towards the south-western defences of Veliki Luki, moved slowly through the defended approaches of the town, and conducted bitter battles for the fortified points Tarashchanka, Mishneva Bova, and Sakh. Bogdanovskiy south of Veliki Luki.

The 9th. Guards Rifle Division had, by the 26th. of November, driven the Germans out of the fortified points Bubново, Botovo, and Replyanka. On the 28th. of November, units of the division, in cooperation with the 1188th. Regiment of the 357th. Division, were successful in encircling the enemy group in the area of Shiripina, and with parts of its force in reaching the railway in the area of Ostrian.

The 46th. Guards Rifle Division, advancing in the direction of the station Chernozem, was able, despite strong enemy opposition, to occupy Karelovo, Kostelovo, and Mishutkino, and, on the 26th. of November, station Chernozem, and, on the 27th. of November, Varaksino.

The 21st. Guards Rifle Division, operating on a wide front, was able to advance four kilometers during four days of bitter fighting, and reached the line Sazonkino, Bernkovo, Kostishche, and Ryukovo.

On the 27th. of November the Army Commander decided to throw the 15th. Mechanized Brigade (of the 2nd. Mechanized Corps) into the breach which had developed in the central sector of the enemy's front. The brigade was to concentrate in the woods east of Suragino in the night 27/28th. of November from where it was to send out a strong detachment to capture the town of Novosokol'niki on the same day. On the 28th. of November the brigade fought its way into the area east of Suragino. One of the brigades' reinforced battalions started to move in the direction of Novosokol'niki, but met strong enemy opposition. The brigade commander quickly committed his entire force but even at that the capture of the rail junction Novosokol'niki was not accomplished until 1600 hours on the 29th. of November, that is, twenty-four hours later than planned. From the start the attack was not a successful one. The enemy

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was able to organize a strong defence at favorably located fortified points in the approaches to the town. The brigade did not have enough strength to seize the town since it had suffered heavy losses in the battle for the approaches. Besides that, the brigade had to cover its rear which was constantly under the attack of various German detachments.

The 381st. Rifle Division, encountering practically no opposition during the first day, enveloped Veliki Luki from the north-west along the line Gorovatha-Rzhevina, at the same time cutting the railway Veliki Luki - Nasva. The Commander of the 381st. Rifle Division sent the 1261st. Rifle Regiment with the 146th. Tank battalion to Veliki Luki, and, with the remaining two regiments continued the attack on Novosokol'niki. The 1261st. Rifle Regiment, repulsing attacks from small enemy detachments, slowly moved towards Veliki Luki. On the 28th. of November the regiment dislodged the enemy from Zolotkovo and

Kryukovo, and with parts of its units and some tanks reached the outskirts of Veliki Luki. The units of the division advancing to Novosokol'niki fought, on the 28th. of November, along the line Gvozdoovo, Shushulina, Khotkovo.

The Army Commander having received the information of the withdrawal of the 8th. German Tank Division from the area of Nasva, ordered the Commander of the 31st. Rifle Brigade, who at that time was located in the area of Arkhovy, to move to the area of Sopki, Tulubyevo, to occupy a defensive position, and to deny the enemy access to Veliki Luki from the north-west. The 44th. Ski and 54th. Rifle Brigades were being sent into the same area and for the same purpose from the area of Cholmsk. The 31st. Rifle Brigade, reaching the designated boundary, became engaged in battle with superior German forces.

At the same time, the Army Commander, receiving information that the left flank of his army was threatened by the 291st. German Infantry Division which was approaching from Nevel, ordered the 235th. Regiment of his reserve with one battalion of the 184th. Tank Brigade, to move to the line Varkulevo, Danchenki, and to prevent that division

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from reaching the front. At the same time, in order to reinforce its left flank, the Army Commander sent the 45th. Ski Brigade and two regiments of the 360th. Rifle Division in that direction.

Thus, by the end of the 28th. of November, the enemy's defences in the area Veliki Luki - station Chernozem were broken, his grouping in the area of Shiripina was encircled, all the roads leading into Veliki Luki from the west were cut, and the town itself almost completely encircled. The 31st. Rifle Brigade repulsed the German advance from Nasvy with difficulty. On our left flank, with our re-grouping and the arrival of new German units, a tense situation developed. At that time, all the forces of the 3rd. Shock Army, with the exception of some small detachments, were committed, and the Army Commander, in order to reinforce one sector, had to move troops from one sector to the other.

On the 28th. of November the Germans started to attack. The German forces defending Novosokol'niki with units of the 3rd. Mountain Rifle Division, reinforced by parts of the 55th. Chemical Mortar Regiment (48 six-barrelled mortars), shifted the 138th. Mountain Rifle Regiment into the area of station Chernozem. The enemy also started to concentrate troops on the flanks in order to assume the offensive from the north-west, from Nasvy, and from the south, from the area of Poroch'ye, in the general direction of Veliki Luki.

The 8th. German Tank Division did not wait until it was completely assembled, and started an attack on the morning of the 28th. of November from the line of the river Bol-Vdny. At the same time units of the 291st. Infantry Division started to move from the area of Poroch'ye and west.

The Battle in the Novosokol'niki Area: The 18th. Mechanized Brigade started the battle for Novosokol'niki on the 29th. of November, but it was not successful. A detachment of its tanks, advancing to the outskirts of the city, were cut off by enemy artillery fire. The brigade, having spent its ammunition, assumed the defensive along the south-eastern approaches to the town. The 1259th. Rifle Regiment of the 381st.

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Rifle Division, advancing on Novosokol'niki from the line Shushulino, Fedotkovo, fought for the north-eastern approaches to the town. Not having coordinated the action of this regiment with that of the 18th. Mechanized Brigade, it also was unsuccessful.

The Army Commander reinforced the Novosokol'niki group by sending to it the 1261st. Rifle Regiment of the 381st. Rifle Division. The Army Commander also despatched into that area, from his reserve, the 34th. Mechanized Brigade with the Tank Regiment of the 43rd. Mechanized Brigade. The Commander of the 2nd. Mechanized Corps was given overall command in their direction.

The attack on the town of Novosokol'niki was started in the morning of the 3rd. of December, but as a result of the disjointed action by the troops, it was not successful.

As a result of the counterattack which was being mounted by the German 8th. Tank Division at that time, a serious situation had developed in the sector of the 31st. Rifle Brigade and some of the forces operating in the Novosokol'niki direction were transferred. The remaining forces were not strong enough to capture the town. The attack was discontinued and the units received orders to assume the defensive along the eastern approaches to the town. Occupying the assigned boundary, the units conducted a defensive battle from the 7th. to the 13th. of December. The enemy, having suffered heavy losses and not expecting success in this direction, likewise assumed the defensive.

The Repulse of the German Counterattacks on the Flanks and the Destruction of the Shiripinsk Enemy Group. On the 28th. of November the German 8th. Tank Division, reinforced by two battalions of SS started a counterattack from the line of the river Bol. Udray. On the 28th. the enemy was not successful and only on the 29th., after heavy artillery and air preparation, was he able to capture Muchina and Korniyaki. Particularly bitter fighting developed here from the 30th. of November to the 2nd. of December. The Germans, attacked the positions of the 3rd. Rifle Brigade several times each day but were unsuccessful. On

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the 3rd. of December the enemy concentrated infantry and tanks in the Muchina area and renewed his counter-offensive in three directions, namely, to Bobrovo, Pavlovo, and Koshali. This time more than two regiments with 50 tanks attacked. Enemy air force continuously bombed the positions of the 31st. Rifle Brigade.

On the 4th. of December the Germans, having brought in fresh forces by motor transport seized Ryadnevo and Timokhny. The situation was that only 10 kilometers separated them from Veliki Luki. The Army Commander despatched into that area the newly arrived 26th. Rifle Brigade and, from his reserve, the 36th. Tank Brigade. The 1261st. Rifle Regiment, being shifted from Novosokol'niki was given the task of striking at Ryadnevo and stopping any further German advance. To cover Veliki Luki from the north-west the 1188th. Rifle Regiment of the 357th. Rifle Division moved to the line Zemlyanichina - Il'yino, and the 1259th. Rifle Regiment into the area Mal.Alestikino. As a result of all these moves further German advance was halted. By the 10th. of December it became possible to throw back the Germans and to seize several localities, among these Ryadnevo and Timokhny. The enemy having suffered heavy losses was forced to assume the defensive in this direction.

Simultaneously with the battles at Novosokol'niki a bitter fight was fought on the army's left flank with units of the 291st. (German) Infantry Division, which was advancing from Nevel. The 235th. Rifle Regiment, reinforced by units of the 184th. Tank Brigade and the 699th. Tank Destroyer Regiment, being shifted in the night from the 27 to the 28th. of November into the area of Vorkulevo-Danchenki, attacked, from the march, the column of the 506th. (German) Infantry Regiment and inflicted on it heavy losses. A fierce battle was fought with the remainder of the approaching division, as a result of which it was possible to hold the main German force and to inflict heavy losses on it.

With the arrival of the main elements of the 291st. (German) Infantry Division and the 90th. Regiment of the 20th. Motorized Division, the enemy forces were strengthened considerably. The battle took

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on a protracted character and the situation on the front stabilized.

Already, on the 29th. of November units of the 9th. Guards Division together with the 1188th. Rifle Regiment of the 357th. Rifle Division encircled the German group composed of the remnants of the 343rd. and 344th. Security battalions and units of the 251st. and 257th. infantry regiments and a battalion of the 1st. Chemical Mortar Regiment in the area of Shiripinsk, Shelkov, Markov, and Telezhnikov. The Germans attached considerable importance to this grouping since it delayed our forces considerably and made their movement more difficult.

The liquidation of this group was entrusted to the Commander of the 9th. Guards Rifle Division. The attack started the night of the 2nd. of December and continued throughout the 3rd. As a result of the determined battle the greater part of the Shiripinsk enemy group was destroyed.

Summary of the First Phase of the Operation. In the battles from the 25th. of November to the 10th. of December the troops of the 3rd. Shock Army broke through the enemy defences, encircled Veliki Luki, and stopped all enemy attempts to break through to the city from the flanks. The units in the central sector advanced 20 to 25 kms. but were unable to seize Novosokol'niki. The Germans, making good use of the roads, were able to move sufficient forces to the front and to slow down the breakthrough. Despite the fact that the army had fulfilled its assignment in the main (with the exception of the liquidation of the Veliki Luki garrison and the capture of Novosokol'niki), the further progress of the operation took on a protracted character. The reasons for this were the following:

1. Despite the superiority in men and materials, particularly in the direction of the main thrust, the advance was slow, and because of the lack of good reconnaissance of the enemy, the operation was groping.

2. The line construction of the Army's order of battle, the ob-  
~~scarcely~~ ~~scarcely~~ of strong second echelons, led to the development that, soon after the breakthrough, all the troops had become involved in combat

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and the commander did not have any forces available to deliver a strike at the decisive moment. He had to reinforce one sector of the front by denuding another, which, of course, reduced the speed of operations, since the troops wasted considerable time in re-grouping.

3. After the breakthrough of the enemy's defences, many tasks presented themselves to the commander simultaneously: to seize Veliki Luki and Novosokol'niki, to liquidate the Shiripinsk group, and to ward off the attacks from the flanks. Despite all this the decisive sector - the threat of a breakthrough from the north-west - was correctly appreciated. A strong force was concentrated in this direction at the expense of weakening other sectors.

4. Insufficient attention had been paid to the fortified points like Veliki Luki and Novosokol'niki, although the strength of their defences was well known. As a matter of fact, less than three regiments attacked Veliki Luki. The attacking forces spent their strength on the breakthrough of the approaches, and their further advance was negligible because the divisional commander did not have any reserves, and parts of the force had to be transferred from one sector to the other.

The same occurred in the Novosokol'niki sector, which was constantly reinforced by separate regiments and brigades; the units were led into battle not well enough organized and without proper coordination of the activity of the various arms. This gave the enemy the opportunity to destroy individual attacks, and even to mount small attacks at the weak spots.

5. The employment of the 2nd. Mechanized Corps by brigades resulted in the strength of this large formation being expended piecemeal with little effect.

6. Already in the first week of the operation our available reserves had been committed. Further development of the battle depended in many respects on the timely arrival of our reserves from the rear and from other sectors of the front.

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The Defeat of the Germans in the Veliki Luki Area : After the German attempts to reach the Veliki Luki garrison from the north-west had failed, the enemy transferred his major force into the area Zharki, Razinki, in order to be as close to Veliki Luki as possible. In this direction were sent, besides those troops which had operated in Borshchanka and Chernosem, parts of the 291st. Infantry Division from the southern sector.

The following tasks faced the commander of the 3rd. Shock Army: to prevent the enemy from reaching Veliki Luki from that direction, and, at the same time, destroy the Veliki Luki garrison. In that period by fierce fighting, an eight-kilometer wide front was opened up. This battle was characterized by the fact that both sides threw in all their forces which they were able to collect by re-grouping and by moving up from the rear.

On the morning of the 11th. of December, after an artillery preparation, five German battalions supported by tanks started an attack. After several short attacks the enemy was able to reach the area Popnov and Gromov. The attacks were continued in the following days by constantly growing forces and on the 14th. of December, the Germans, after defeating parts of the 9th. Guards Rifle Division, occupied Gromov. The timely arrival of the 19th. Guards Rifle Division on the line Butino-Botovo, enabled it to start a counter-attack on the 15th. of December, to seize Gromov, and together with the 9th. Guards Rifle Division, to stop the enemy's advance. In the period of the 15th. to the 18th. of December the enemy reinforced his group by transferring from other sectors the 20th. Motorized Division and the tank battalions of the 11th. and 18th. Tank Divisions. On the morning of the 19th. of December the enemy attacked us again with a force of about a division, supported by 50 tanks, in the area of Bashmakov. At the same time, the enemy increased his activity on our left flank with the aim of eliminating the threat to his riverside grouping. Several enemy attacks were repulsed by us in the area of Bol.Chorenka.

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In order to counter the difficult situation, the army commander took the following measures to strengthen the central sector of the front. In the night to the 20th. of December, the 44th. and 45th. Ski brigades were concentrated in the area of Telezhnikov, and units of the 9th. Guards Rifle Corps in the area of Botovo. The 360th. Rifle Division, reaching the area of Bugry, had the capability in the event of need to move either in the direction of Borshchanka or towards the left flank. The newly arrived 249th. Rifle Division, assembled with two regiments in the area of Burtsev.

Despite heavy losses the enemy continued his attacks from the 20th. to the 22nd. of December. His 291st. Infantry Division operating on a narrow front and supported by 40 to 50 tanks again and again struck in the direction of Burtsev. As the result of relentless fighting, the enemy was able to capture Alekseykovo on the 21st. of December. The Army Commander, in order to liquidate the penetration, committed parts of the 249th. Rifle Division (the 921st. and 925th. Rifle Regiments), but these, alone, were not enough to stop the enemy. It was found necessary to exchange these for the 44th. and 45th. Ski Brigades, supported by the 45th. Tank Regiment, which, after bitter fighting, stopped the German advance.

By the end of the 21st. of December the enemy reached the line Pupnov, Alekseykovo, Maksimikha. With that, the strength of the 291st. Infantry Division was spent. The 20th. Motorized Division was transferred to that sector, and it, together with the reinforced 291st. Infantry Division, again started to attack. Their attack followed one another almost without interruption. Only in one day of battle, the 23rd. of December, 7 German attacks were repulsed and over 20 tanks destroyed. Despite these heavy losses the enemy tried to retain the initiative to continue to push forward. On the 23rd. of December, in order to reinforce the threatened sector, in the area of Gribushino, Shiripino, and Batalikha, the 360th. Rifle Division and the 100th. Rifle Brigade was moved in while the 43rd. Mechanized Brigade was concentrated as the army commander's reserve in the area of Koznetsov.

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On the 24th. of December, according to the orders of the Army Commander, the 360th. Rifle Division and the 44th. and 45th. Ski Brigades delivered a counter-strike in the direction of Alekseykovo. Their attack developed into a series of bitter meeting engagements, some of which were hand to hand. By 1500 hours the 44th. Ski Brigade had captured Alekseykovo and was fighting for the heights west of the town, which changed hands several times.

Fearing the encirclement of its riverside grouping, the Germans decided to withdraw it from the bag which was developing, and, with the troops released by shortening the front, reinforce the thrust in the central sector. On the 24th. of December, covered by rearguards, the enemy withdrew to the line Medvedkovo, Furyalovo, river Lovat. The 1st. SS Brigade and the 5th. Yager Battalion, which were freed by this manoeuvre, were sent to the central sector of the front.

In the following six days of incessant bitter fighting, and despite the introduction of fresh forces, the Germans were unable to break through to the encircled Veliki Luki garrison. Particularly heavy were their attacks on the 30th. and the 31st. of December, but despite the strong support by tanks and aircraft, success was denied to the Germans and they lost over 20 tanks. The enemy was thrown back towards the west by a counterattack on the 3rd. of January and our units again occupied Pukovo (the eastern).

On the morning of the 4th. of January the Germans committed the 205th. Infantry Division which had been transferred from the Velizha area. This formation, according to the prisoners, had the assignment of reaching Veliki Luki by the morning of the 5th. of January. Two regiments of that division, supported by 50 to 60 tanks and 25 assault guns, started to advance in the direction of Burtseva, Alekseykovo. Under the strong pressure of a superior enemy, our units were forced to abandon these settled localities.

On the 5th. of January the enemy continued his attacks. Despite continued counterattacks by our troops, the enemy was able, by the end of the 6th. of January, to occupy Sakhny and Selilova. The Germans

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reinforced their thrust while it was still in progress by transferring the striking force of the 331st. Rifle Division, three security regiments, and the 6th., 8th., and 2nd. Yezer battalions from the western front. By doing this they were able to attain a marked superiority, and the battle in the central sector flared up again with the new forces. On the 7th. of January the Germans were able to capture Demya and Pechishche, but the attack of one regiment supported by 15 tanks on Shiripino was broken by the stubbornness of our troops.

In order to help its striking force, the German Command, repeated its attempt to break through the front north-west of Sokol'niki. At the price of heavy losses the enemy was able to capture Enkino, Lurovo, and Grebnevo, but he was unable to advance further. With that the enemy's second strike from the north-west was stopped.

Meanwhile, in the central sector of the front the situation became worse. On the 8th. of January the Germans were able to cut the railway Veliki Luki - Novosokol'niki, and in further combat reached the area Donos'yev, Belodedovo.

Units of the front reserve 32nd. Rifle Division approached on the 9th. of January. Its 113th. Rifle Regiment, composing, together with the 184th. Tank Brigade, the advance guard, delivered a flank attack at the German wedge from Markovo to Iekseykovo, forcing the enemy to withdraw parts of its forces and relieving ours in the direction of Belodedovo. Nevertheless the situation remained very serious as the Germans approached to within 4 to 5 kms. of Veliki Luki on the 10th. of January. The German Field Marshal Von Kluge, according to prisoners, had set the relief of Veliki Luki as the target for the 10th. of January, regardless of cost.

Continuing the battle for the destruction of the Veliki Luki garrison in the approaches of the town and even in the town itself, units of the 3rd. Shock Army at the same time approached the fortified line west of the town of Veliki Luki. Already on the 2nd. of January two regiments of the 357th. Rifle Division occupied the defended line height 108.9, the eastern outskirts of Rybiki (the western), Sukh. Bog-

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danovskiy (not shown on map) and started to re-build it with the front facing west.

The main defended line was laid out in the line Yeremeyevo, height 129.2, Melenka, raz. Volebedskoye (not shown on map - south-west of Veliki Luki). For the defence of this line several units were brought up including the 56th. Engineer Brigade.

In the battles of the 10th. to the 12th. of January the Germans were able to advance a little, but they were finally stopped by the determined defence of our troops. All the attempts made by the enemy to break through to the town failed.

The enemy's plan to reach Veliki Luki was unsuccessful despite the considerable forces that he committed in the central sector. As the result of a month's bitter fighting the enemy was only able to advance 13 to 15 kms. on a very narrow front, that is, about 0.5 km. per day. This achievement placed the enemy in a very unfavorable position not only did they not reach their target - Veliki Luki - but their thrust was so narrow that in several places it could be cut by machine gun fire, and it was very vulnerable to being cut by our troops from the flanks.

The Battle for the Town of Veliki Luki (Sketch 14 - not included in translation, can be found on page 96 of the original). Already on the 30th. of November our troops closed the ring around Veliki Luki encircling the town and its garrison of about 7000 men.

From the 2nd. of December our units were preparing for the final assault and conducted a fire battle. On the 9th. of December the Commander of the 3rd. Shock Army decided to take the town by direct assault. The main thrust was to be delivered by the forces of the 257th. and 357th. Rifle Divisions on the western part of the town. The 7th. Estonian Rifle Division, which had newly arrived from the reserve, was to relieve units of the 257th. Rifle Division, which at that time operated ~~to~~ to the north, east, and west of the town. After the relief the 7th. Estonian Division was to conduct a number of supporting thrusts from the north, east, and west. The complete liquidation of

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the enemy was to start on the 16th. of December.

10 % of the divisional artillery was assigned to the support of the infantry, the artillery preparation for the attack was to last two hours and fifteen minutes. Of this time, two hours were set aside for the destruction fire on the enemy's defences.

The air force was to deliver a strike against the central and eastern parts of the town during the night preceding the attack. During the day of the attack it was to suppress the enemy's defences in the south-western sector of the town, in the fortress, and on both shores of the river Lovat' (in the centre of the town). The attack was to take place on the 12th. of December.

For the battle in the town special detachments, consisting of infantry, sappers, and chemical warfare men, were formed. Each of these detachments was reinforced by artillery and tanks. Besides that each battalion was to prepare one reinforced platoon for exclusive use in night fighting.

The troops prepared according to this plan. Completion of this order was attempted more or less seriously by the units of the 257th. Rifle Division, where five assault detachments were formed. Each of the detachments was about 100 men strong, divided into the following groups: reconnaissance, assault, support, holding, and a reserve. In addition, to each detachment were assigned sappers, chemical warfare men, machine gunners, mortar and artillery men. For the transportation of the infantry the sappers had built special triangular sleighs with two walls between which sand and stone had been placed. These sleighs were to be pulled by tanks. Personnel of the detachments were exercised in street fighting on special models constructed of snow.

Much less serious attention to the preparation was paid by the commanders of the 357th. and especially of the 7th. Estonian Division. These considered it sufficient to reinforce regular battalions with heavy weapons and specialists, instead of forming special detachments.

On the 12th. of December the assault on account of the heavy fog could not be carried out and was postponed until the next day.

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On the 13th. of December the fog had not decreased. Despite the fact that the visibility was very limited, the units received the order to attack. The air force was, on account of the fog, unable to operate prior to or during the attack. The fire of the artillery and mortars was not nearly as effective on account of the fog. The assaulting infantry was met by strong enemy fire and had to lie down in the snow. Only the 257th. Rifle Division was able to break through to the north-western outskirts of the town. The assault groups moved forward step by step, preparing the road for the infantry, clearing the remaining enemy from the city blocks. The 9 8th. Rifle Regiment succeeded in crossing the river Lovat with parts of its forces and in entrenching on the eastern shore of the river. Further advance was denied to this division by heavy enemy fire from the eastern shore of the river and the fortified point Rykanovo.

The unsatisfactory preparation by the 357th. and 7th. Estonian Rifle Divisions showed in the lack of success of their operations. The left flanking regiment of the 357th. Rifle Division, exploiting the success of the 257th. Rifle Division, by-passed the fortress from the north and reached the river. The remaining regiments continued to fight in their departure positions for the remainder of the day. The 7th. Estonian Rifle Division did not achieve any success throughout the day.

During the 14th. to the 16th. of December the battle continued with undiminished ferocity. The 257th. Rifle Division conquered the north-western sector of the town and the distillery on the eastern shore of the river Lovat. The 357th. Rifle Division, re-grouped, and after several attacks, seized the fortified point Rybiki (the western). By the 16th. of December its 1188th. and 1192nd. Rifle Regiments reached the fortress from the west, and the 1190th. Rifle Regiment engaged the fortress from the north. The 7th. Estonian Rifle Division after three days of fighting subdued several populated places and with its 300th. Rifle Regiment approached the south-western outskirts of the town.

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The task of subduing the town by the 16th. of December was not accomplished for the following reasons:

- the indecisive action of units, particularly the 7th. Estonian Division, which preferred to conduct battle by fire.
- insufficient cooperation between tanks and infantry; tanks and infantry did not exploit sufficiently the result of artillery fire; the tanks, moving forward, separated from the infantry and did not support its advance.
- the frequent breaks in control, thus the tasks became insufficiently clear, furthermore the current lines failed to work on account of the burning-out of equipment, there was a lack of radio sets, signal flares could not be used, and messengers on foot and liaison officers quickly became casualties on account of enemy fire.
- insufficient account was taken of the experience of the first days of fighting and mistakes were not corrected quickly enough.

The Army Commander decided, on the 16th. of December, in order to strengthen the Veliki Iuki group to introduce one regiment of the 249th Rifle Division into the battle. Units of the 7th. Estonian Rifle Division and the 249th. Rifle Division were assigned the task to attack the town from the south. The 357th. Rifle Division was to attack the town from the west. The 257th. Rifle Division was, after handing over part of the town to the 357th. Rifle Division, to engage Rykanovy and at the same time to liquidate this defended point which was a threat to our flanks. Because of the slowness of the troops during the re-grouping, previous mistakes were repeated. Areas were handed over slowly, there was no time left for preparing the attacks (more accurately, they were poorly planned), and units of the 7th. Estonian and the 249th. Rifle Division did not prepare for the attack at all. The result of all this was not slow in showing. In the battles from the 18th. to the 24th. of December, the 257th. Rifle Division conquered Rykanovy and pushed from the north-western into the central part of the town. The 357th. Rifle Division finally cleaned up the western part of the town and completely encircled the garrison of the fortress. The Estonian units, operating

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against an impregnable wall, did not attain success.

The Army Commander decided to introduce into the battle the remaining regiments of the 249th. Rifle Division and of the 47th. Mechanized Brigade and with these to annihilate the Veliki Luki garrison. According to the Army Commander's plan, the 257th. Rifle Division advancing from Rykanovo was to reach the centre of the town and there was to meet the 47th. Mechanized Brigade, which was advancing from the south, and units of the 249th. Rifle Division advancing from the line Tarashchanka, Mishneva, Bova, and the 7th. Estonian Rifle Division which was advancing from the area Sotovo. In view of the size of the breakthrough from the south-west, the 357th. Rifle Division was to defend the western sector of the town with two regiments and only with one regiment to attack from the west, detailing this to cooperate with the 257th. Rifle Division.

On the 25th. of December the units started the final assault. Just as in the previous battles, the 257th. Rifle Division acted more or less intelligently. On the 28th. of December it liquidated the German fortified point of Vedenshchina and on the 30th. of December it occupied the western sector of the town, anticipating violent reaction from the ~~enemy~~ enemy. Meanwhile the 47th. Mechanized Brigade broke through the enemy's defences in the southern sector and moved to the centre. Of great assistance to it were the flame-thrower tanks of the 13th. Tank Regiment, which burned the Germans out of strong emplacements. By the end of the day only four blocks separated the units of the 257th. Rifle Division advancing from the north, from the 47th. Mechanized Brigade, operating from the south. The units of the 7th. Estonian and the 249th. Rifle Division did not make any progress.

On the 31st. of December bitter fights developed. The enemy, pushed from three sides and under the threat of encirclement, started to withdraw to the railroad junction. On that day the 257th. Rifle Division and the 47th. Mechanized Brigade seized the entire centre of the town taking much booty and over 300 prisoners; the 357th. Division cleared the enemy from the islands in the river. The success of our troops in the centre of the town weakened the German defences in the other sectors

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Up to the 10th of January the Germans lost in the battle for  
reclaim work over 1000 killed and wounded, over 500 prisoners, 47 guns,  
46 howitzers and 10 structural ones), and large amounts of weapons  
and ammunition.

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he assembled large forces for the completion of this task.

The activity of our troops in this operation was purposeful. The majority of the available forces was despatched in the important direction - from west to east. It can be said for the assault that the 257th Rifle Division and 357th Rifle Divisions <sup>of the 1st Army</sup> were the main thrust. With this it is necessary to mention the contribution of the 257th Rifle Division.

At the same time, the commander always selected the most favorable moment for the assault or those which hindered the enemy's movement. As a result, the division gained freedom of movement.

The division's experience in combat for a long time was the result of which several

particularly in a built-up area, and the encircled enemy can spend considerable time. Therefore it is necessary to follow the element has to be followed the enemy the opportunity to unnecessary losses. Besides, it is wrong because an assault without preparation will result in heavy losses. The community should be built on their centres of resistance and the 257th Division was largely successful, all the time liquidation, which hindered free crossing of the river Lovat. The battle into the centre of the defended point Ve enshchina. Units disengaged from the strike the north through Zentsy, Pop-

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3. the order of battle within a built-up area should be specifically designed for that purpose. The assaulting units, operating in segments between defended points should be divided into small independent groups. Therefore, the best order of battle for a populated place are assault troops, equipped with all types of weapons. Clever action by these assault groups simplifies the activity of the follow-up infantry.

The assault groups should push forward with determination disregarding defended points which remain intact in their rear or on the flanks. For this purpose it is necessary to have a strong second echelon and a reserve to follow up closely behind the assault groups and to repulse any counter attacks.

4. The control of a battle for a built-up locality is always difficult and the signals have to work without interruption. This forces the commanders of formations and units to be quite close to the troops, and commanders of subunits are often faced with tasks which they have to solve immediately and to exploit success where it presents itself.

5. the organization and training of personnel to be led into battle for a town should be given exclusive attention which is supported by experience of the 257th. Rifle Division.

The Re-Grouping of the Units of the 3rd. Shock Army for the Counter-Attack. The enemy forces which he was moving towards Veliki Luki were continuously slowed down by the constant attacks of our troops and already by the 13th. of January they had lost considerable impetus. The liquidation of the Veliki Luki garrison had a considerable moral effect because it removed the aim of the attack. Besides that, they were in a difficult situation because they were in a narrow corridor which could be cut by our troops any time. Expecting this, the enemy assumed the defensive on the 13th. of January and despatched the newly-arrived 6th. Airborne and 708th. Infantry Divisions to reinforce the corridor.

During the 13th. of January the Commander of the 3rd. Shock Army concentrated forces in the area of Grubishino, Shiripino, for a counter-attack. The main counter-attack against the enemy wedge was delivered

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in the direction of Selilova, Dones'yev; a subsidiary strike was launched against the northern tip of the wedge.

On the morning of the 16th. of January the 3rd. Shock Army assumed the offensive with the assignment to destroy the enemy in the area Selilovo, Dones'yev.

Meeting strong resistance, and repulsing many counter-attacks, our units fought a bitter battle during which several settled localities changed hands several times. By the end of the 20th. of January the troops of the 3rd. Shock Army reached the area Borshchanka, Demya, Alekseykovo, where they entrenched themselves. The territory for the capture of which the Germans had spent 22 days was liberated by us in 5 days.

Summary and Conclusions. As a result of operations which occupied the enemy for eleven months, the Nevel' centre was destroyed, and the strategically more important Veliki Luki was in our hands. By capturing the area of Veliki Luki our forces were now in a much more favorable operational position.

During the operation the enemy suffered heavy losses. In killed and wounded he lost 59,150 men in addition to 4,025 prisoners. In the course of the battle the 83rd. Infantry Division and over ten separate units and subunits were destroyed; the 291st. Infantry, the 3rd. Mountain Rifle, the 20th. Motorized and the 8th. Tank Division were dispersed by our troops, and the 205th., the 331st., and the 708th. Infantry divisions suffered heavy losses. In order to stabilize the situation the enemy had to redeploy troops from other fronts which relieved the pressure on our troops in these sectors.

From the experience of <sup>the</sup> Veliki Luki operation several general conclusions can be drawn:

1. the lack of a strong second echelon in the army prevented the quick exploitation of the success of the operation and failed in the quick achievement of a decisive result. Our initial superiority in strength during the battle decreased constantly by the commitment of his reserves so that by the end of the operation, in the second half of

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December, the opposing forces were just about equal.

The constant introduction of reserves by both sides resulted in extending the battle. When at the beginning of the battle, the introduction of divisions would have had a marked effect, the introduction of new divisions towards the end of the operation had much less effect.

2. the two months' manoeuvre battle showed that in modern times, operations in which large formations operate from both sides, including infantry, artillery and tanks, such operations are quite possible even in such a difficult theatre as described and under difficult winter conditions.

3. As is shown by the experience of the battle, the organization of an operation even with a limited objective is rather difficult. The forces brought together from different fronts, concentrate in their marching order. This demands from the staffs careful planning, the timely reconnaissance of routes of march, and firm traffic control. In the above example, troops were committed without adequate preparation (e.g. the 2nd. Mechanized Corps and the 8th. Estonian Corps).

4. The Veliki Luki operation again demonstrates the need for timely reconnaissance. In this operation the enemy's system of defence was only well-known in the town itself and in the area of the Forzhonsk centre of resistance. Of the strength, composition, or the system of fire of the intervening sectors only sketchy information was available. It was not even known where the forward German defence line was located. This resulted in the fact that parts of the 14th. Guards Corps operated in the dark. Their forward elements, which were given the task of reconnaissance, did not fulfil it, which resulted in delays and slowdowns of the activities of the troops.

5. In-complete data about the enemy had its effect on the planning of the operation. In several instances the army commander had to set tasks as the result of difficulties which were arising (the 9th. and the 16th. Guards Rifle Divisions). This also affected the action of the advancing divisions who acted without determination. The force initially detailed to seize the fortified sector of Novosokol'niki (a

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reinforced regiment and a battalion) proved entirely insufficient. Likewise insufficient proved to be the force originally despatched to seize Veliki Luki, particularly after it was found to be necessary to despatch the 381st. Rifle Division in the direction of Novosokol'niki. As a result neither Veliki Luki nor Novosokol'niki was captured at once time was wasted and the following extended operations required twice the force which had been originally planned.

6. The tank and mechanized forces were committed as brigades which precluded their use in massed attack. This can be explained by the fact that the army commander had to commit his whole reserve as the situation demanded. The same occurred with the rifle divisions and brigades which were being brought up from the rear. They were committed to battle immediately even without being given adequate time to concentrate and as the battle required. They were formed into battle groups which attacked frequently without coordinating the timing which considerably reduced their effect.

7. The battle for Veliki Luki developed with several significant intervals. This gave the enemy the opportunity to re-group and to mend the breaches in his defences. Besides the insufficient forces, this was caused by the fact that, as with the army commander, all the forces of the Divisional Commander were committed, there was no reserve, and there was nothing available to continue the attack without interruption.

8. Planning was often conducted without taking adequate account of the time and of the preparation of the troops. On account of this there were frequent delays in the starting of operations, and this resulted not only in the disruption of the general plan but also gave the enemy the opportunity to anticipate our plans and to take counter measures. These delays only led to further extensions in the completion of our tasks, and in heavy losses.

9. During the assault on Veliki Luki little attention was paid to the breakthrough of the inner line of defence and his forces were underestimated. The whole attention was concentrated on the centre. As a result of this almost half of the forces designated for the assault

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On the town were expended on the inner line of defence. In the battle for the town insufficiently close cooperation was organized with the troops fighting for the settled communities (Combat Service Regulations, part 2 page 515).

The experience of the battle for Veliki Luki showed that the detailed working-out of the assault plan, the careful preparation of the troops and officers is of primary importance which helps the battle considerably and reduces casualties.

10. Despite the fact that the staffs dealt satisfactorily with the problems of administration, its weakest point was the organization of coordinated action between the different arms. Very often this work was done by the staffs on maps, and even if on the ground, at one point only far away from the field of battle. From the beginning of the battle the staffs were able to support the joint action planned from the beginning which deteriorated continuously. The staffs did not know how to re-establish the lost cooperation in the course of battle.

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